

A Night With the Dead

It happened in the 1890's. A middle-aged couple driving a buggy along a New England road were overtaken by darkness. Not knowing how far away was the next town, they started looking for a place to spend the night. Soon they spotted a light to one side of the road and up a lane through the trees. They turned their tired horse and drove towards it.

The light turned out to be in a small farmhouse on a little hill between two huge elms. The husband rapped on the door, while his wife sat in the buggy.

An aged couple came to the door with a kerosene lamp. When the situation was explained to them, they invited the travelers in for the night. The two couples got along pleasantly, found that they had much in common and, after a warming cup of tea, they all retired. The host refused any payment for the lodgings.

The next morning the travelers rose early to be on their way. So as not to embarrass their host and hostess, they left some silver coins on the table in the hall before they slipped out of the house to hitch up their horse.

Driving to the next town, which proved to be just a couple of miles farther through the woods, they stopped at an inn for breakfast.

Over coffee, they mentioned to the innkeeper where they had stopped the night before and how much they had enjoyed talking with the old couple. The innkeeper looked at them in astonishment. They couldn't have done any such thing, he told them, for he knew the house and the Edmunds who had lived there. The Edmunds had died 20 years before.

The travelers were incredulous. Edmunds was the name the old couple had given them. Their descriptions of the couple tallied with the innkeeper's but the travelers knew they had spoken with the Edmunds and drunk tea with them.

"Impossible," scoffed the innkeeper. The Edmunds had been burned to death in a fire that had completely destroyed their home and it had never been rebuilt. The argument grew hot. Finally the travelers insisted on driving the innkeeper back to the farm to prove they had slept there the night before.

Back they went the two miles. There, to their horror, all they found was an empty cellar hole overgrown with weeds and filled with burned timbers and blackened furniture. The couple could not believe their eyes. But then it was the innkeeper's turn to pale. With a cry to terror, the wife pointed a shaky finger at one spot in the charred rubble below them. On what might have been a hall table, shone a half dollar and two quarters, just the amount the travelers had left in payment that morning while the Edmunds were still "asleep".